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SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST; MERCOSUR AND FIDEL CASTRO; US-ARGENTINE TIES  
07/24/06

#### 11. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend papers cover the situation in the Middle East; US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's trip to the region; and the outcome and implications of the Mercosur summit in Cordoba.

#### 12. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "The US asks for more pressure against Hezbollah"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" reports (07/23) "According to US President George W. Bush, the US will ask the leaders from the Middle East to increase pressure on Hezbollah and the countries supporting it in order to solve the crisis in the Lebanon.

"So far, the US has supported the Israeli offensive, which included the bombing of Lebanese civilian targets, in spite of the EU's criticism that the Israeli retaliation is 'out of proportion.' On the other hand, it hindered the approval of a UN Security Council resolution ordering a cease fire from Israel.

"... US State Secretary Condoleezza Rice will travel today to the Middle East after having met with Bush and representatives of the Saudi Arabian government. The USG official will meet with Israeli PM Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas during her visit. Her tour will also include a stop in Rome in order to analyze the situation with the US' European and Arab allies."

- "The end of a strategy"

Claudio Mario Aliscioni, columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (07/23) "Among the interpretations raised by the Israeli offensive, there is one that should be taken into account in order to assess the future direction of events - the attack represents the end of the 'democratization' promoted by George W. Bush in the Middle East.

"So far, Lebanon has been the only example of this policy vis-à-vis the Iraqi fiasco.

"In order for Beirut's weak democracy to survive, the condition was allowing Hezbollah to have room in the local parliament. But patience was dismissed and the White House started to encourage the attack. The problem is that the military solution is not enough to guarantee the destruction of the group and will only fuel increasing hatred."

- "Focuses of tension have increased during the last five years"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," comments (07/23) "... Analysts agree

that US President George W. Bush's foreign policy has created greater instability in the world...

"Frank Rich, political analyst of The New York Times, said 'In fact, this presidency has never had a view of the world.' 'It had a fixed idea regarding Iraq, and the chase of said obsession imprudently lowered US power to an improvisation based on intuition and public relations strategies, not a doctrine. This has not changed.'

"A high-ranking USG official told 'La Nacion' that 'Bush's staff believes that criticism reveals a biased and forgetful view. First and foremost, they forget that September 11 attacks changed the world and our priorities. We are at war. Secondly, we are in a situation in which we are always criticized. If we do intervene, we are accused of being imperialistic and similar things. If we maintain a low profile, we are said to be an absent power. What do they want?'

"Michael Shifter, VP for Political Affairs at the Inter-American Dialogue, emphasizes that 'Bush's wrong policies and impressive lack of competence have worsened the situation in many hot places.'

- "Can we still continue being Jews?"

Left-of-center "Pagina 12" carries an opinion piece by contributor Leon Rozitchner, who writes (07/23) "I am not only taking sides with the Palestinian people but with the Jewish people. I do reaffirm that the Jews' historic situation made it necessary for Jews to make up one more nation among the nations of the world... But this fact also imposed on Jews the obligation to respect other peoples' lives just like no other people may perhaps feel it.

"... The escalation against Gaza and Lebanon is in the framework of the expansion of the new liberal Western empire against Muslim countries. Wouldn't the US be the one that, bogged in Iraq, needs a

sure border in Lebanon against Syria and Iran, and from there on, the massacre of civilians in order to invade them?

"... Peace and political understanding are in the Israelis' hands - they only have to decline ambition over territories that do not belong to them and claim the value of life against death."

- "The rupture of Lebanese political unity"

Maria Laura Avignolo, on special assignment in Beirut for leading "Clarín," writes (07/22) "With an imminent Israeli land invasion of Lebanon and the trip of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the region in search of a 'lasting peace' not including an immediate cease fire, Lebanese political unity has started to break into peaces.

"The spirit of the 'Revolution of Cedars' is fainting away. Lebanon cannot forgive Hezbollah for its non-consulted decision to launch missiles against Israel after the kidnapping of soldiers. Lebanon is afraid that the consequence will be Syria recovering control of Lebanon."

- "Is there only one Latin America or several ones"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" carries an opinion piece by political analyst Mariano Grondona, who writes (07/23) "... Bipartisan democracy is the prevailing model in Europe and North America, and also in Latin American countries like Chile, Brazil and Uruguay...

"... We call democratic dictatorship the other political model in Latin America in which one political power has taken over through democratic elections, but it is not willing to acknowledge pluralism and wants to monopolize political life. Here lies the dictatorial element. Discord prevails in countries falling under this category... The Venezuela of Chavez and the Bolivia of Evo Morales pertain to this second kind of regime.

"... For now, Fidel Castro represents, alone, the third Latin American political model. After the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1989, his totalitarian regime is the only surviving dictatorship in the world along with that of North Korean Kim Jong Il.

"We say that Castro acts alone for now because the fact that he was welcomed to the Cordoba meeting represents a serious renunciation of democratic ideals. We should also note that, in violation of Mercosur's fundamental political principle, which is the demand that its member countries should be democratic, Mercosur has just admitted dictator Hugo Chavez as a full member. On the other hand, both Chavez and Morales increasingly show their devotion to Castro. President Kirchner's Peronist left wing is not too far from this devotion."

- "The man with a foreign policy handbook under his arm"

Oscar Raul Cardoso, leading "Clarín's" international analyst, writes (07/22) "Aside from what one thinks of Fidel Castro, it is impossible not to admire the permanent efficiency of the foreign policy of his regime."

"With only a short visit to the Mercosur summit, which was held in Cordoba, the summit changed its profile from a regional to a hemispheric one, and he calmed down a new political offensive from Washington against him."

"During recent weeks, US newspapers strongly speculated about the Cuban leader's health... This is in alignment with the release of the third annual report of the Committee for Assistance to a Free Cuba, a special group created by US President George W. Bush and presided over by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and US Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez."

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"... As a matter of fact, the report is scandalous as an unprecedented example of interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign country."

- "The US believes Mercosur is weakened"

Ana Baron, Washington-based correspondent for leading "Clarín," writes (07/23) "While the US Department of State chose to be silent once again, Republican analysts with access to the White House and Democratic opponents agreed that the Mercosur summit in Cordoba was an essentially political meeting that will not lead to the bloc's commercial and economic consolidation. Even the project to create a regional bank raised Washington's skepticism."

"Claudio Loser, former IMF director for the Western Hemisphere, said 'If the model for this bank was the Andean Corporation, it would be

a good idea, but everything indicates that the bank they want to create would essentially be funded by Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. Then, it is a very attractive idea from a political point of view, but it is senseless from an economic point of view.'"

### 13. EDITORIALS

- "Threat to world peace"

Conservative "La Prensa" editorializes (07/23) "For the sake of the humanitarian minds of the world, which have called for a ceasefire, Israel has decided to finish this work. Israel is determined to destroy Hezbollah by air, land and sea..."

"... Is this an intelligent strategy? We should recall once again that Israel is a full democracy and that its enemies are also enemies of any peace initiative in the region. Hezbollah's missiles are coming from Iran and its attacks would have been impossible had not Syria given its support..."

"Just like pacifist writer Amos Oz has said, a blunt defeat of Hezbollah will be a victory for Lebanon."

- "One summit, many agendas"

Liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald" (07/22) "The high-profile presence of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro joined by the hardly less extreme Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia (who actually pose a bigger threat to the region than Castro - both because of their youth and the fossil fuel wealth of the

countries) has led to yesterday's Mercosur summit in Cordoba being described as tilting the trade bloc left but perhaps the real worry should be about the regional grouping moving in several directions at the same time.

"Much was made of a trade arrangement between Mercosur and Cuba offering preferential prices on up to 2,700 items and thus dodging the US blockade against the island but at the same time Uruguay is actively seeking an FTA with the US...

"Thanks to Chavez, Mercosur is increasingly a political rather than commercial bloc and yet a more political Mercosur is ignoring its democratic clause more than ever by paying attention to the likes of Castro.

"The 'historic' new member Venezuela looms as the bloc's future heavyweight because of its energy wealth yet formally the Mercosur presidency has been transferred to the regional giant, Brazil."

- "Agreement and disagreement in the Southern Cone"

Leading "Clarín" editorializes (07/23) "... One of the dominant aspects of Mercosur's regional relationships is the influence of the energy issue. Mercosur countries have a relationship with Venezuela that is based on some political affinities of its leaders, but basically on the oil contribution that Venezuela can make to the Southern Cone.

"... Mercosur has also signed a deal with Cuba, which will facilitate the mutual access to the two markets, which will primarily benefit Southern Cone exporters, but it is also evaluated as a relief for Cuba bearing in mind the US blockade imposed on the island.

"... This outfit of deals and projects tends to boost regional commercial and financial relations but also to consolidate political accords vis-à-vis the hegemonic power in the region, the US.

"We hope that all these deals will contribute to strengthening the countries' negotiating capability on issues of their national interest, but also that this will not be used as a tool for counter-productive confrontation."

- "The danger posed by a spiral of violence"

Leading "Clarín" (07/24) editorializes "It can be said that the trigger factor of the current conflict in the Middle East were Hamas and Hezbollah's successive attacks against Israel.

"Obviously enough, no country would stay indifferent vis-à-vis events of this nature and Israel has the right to defend itself and guarantee its own security. However, in both cases, the response was out of proportion. And the Israeli response against Lebanon is absolutely out of proportion and threatens to generate huge present and future damage.

"... In brief, Israel could be expanding a spiral of hatred and violence in the Middle East, and its own territory and friendly countries would be the victims."

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